

A Good Investment in Faith in Action
Bobbi Watt Geer, Ph.D.
President & CEO, United Way of Westmoreland County

We have already heard a lot about important programs serving older adults in our communities. I would like to share some information about another program that falls a bit earlier in the continuum, but has been working to help older adults remain living safely and independently in their own homes. (Almost 20% of our population is comprised of older adults, a higher percentage than our neighboring counties.) The program is Faith in Action, based on the successful model developed and supported for many years through the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. UWWC's Faith in Action program provides vital non-medical services through a corps of trained volunteers; it includes four sites operated by UW program directors.

We have been engaged in providing services to older adults for eight years. Faith in Action, which has been supported by private contributions from UWWC's Women's Leadership Council, has served 1,511 older adults since inception, providing 71,133 hours of service through 30 June 2014. These hours include 6,120 trips to medical appointments, 3,213 hours of shopping and errands and 6,340 hours of supportive visits. The services were provided through a corps of 572 trained volunteers across the program. The volunteers are the front line of this program, and they, along with our program directors, are often able to alert family and care providers to health and safety concerns, certainly preventing more serious events. We have estimated the return on investment as \$20 in benefit for every dollar invested.

Faith in Action impacts the lives of older adults, the volunteers who serve them, family members and the community at large. It

provides incredible peace of mind to family members who are not able to provide the care and services, due to geographic distance, work and other family commitments. Faith in Action also returns benefits, such as a sense of purpose, friendship and community service, to the volunteers who participate. We hear stories every day of older adults who had no other way to get to the doctor or who needed someone to check in with them to prevent isolation. I will never forget the story of the gentleman who was blind in one eye and had surgery in his good eye, rendering him temporarily sightless. He needed a ride to a Pittsburgh hospital for follow up care—his option was to get a ride to the Allegheny County border and then wait for Access. Faith in Action escorted him to his appointment.

For those who are not familiar with this program, I hope that this information illustrates both how important the program is and how it can factor into the overall service continuum for older adults in our community. As we seek more effective and creative solutions to best serve our older adult grandparents, parents, friends and neighbors, Faith in Action is both creative and cost effective and can work alongside other programs in our communities. I encourage our legislators to support programs and services for older adults that preserve not just their health, but their dignity. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.